

VZCZCXYZ0001
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHTU #0889/01 2191204
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 061204Z AUG 08 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5454
INFO RUCNMGH/MAGHREB COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 000889

SIPDIS

NEA/MAG (NARDI/HARRIS)
LONDON AND PARIS FOR NEA WATCHER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/05/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [LY](#) [TS](#)
SUBJECT: AL-QADHAFI BEGINS FOUR DAY VISIT TO TUNISIA

Classified By: Ambassador Robert F. Godec for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) Libyan leader Muammer al-Qadhafi arrived in Tunis on August 3 for a four-day visit. In a meeting, President Ben Ali and al-Qadhafi reportedly discussed a range of regional and international issues, although few details have been publicly forthcoming. Al-Qadhafi attended a ribbon-cutting ceremony at Omar El Mohktar City, a low income housing development he helped fund. Ben Ali hosted a dinner for al-Qadhafi on August 4 with Tunisian luminaries and African Ambassadors. While in Tunisia, al-Qadhafi met with civil society representatives, stressing the importance of African and Arab unity. He reportedly was dismissive of the proposed Union for the Mediterranean, saying the African Union and the Arab Maghreb Union would be better vehicles for cooperation. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Upon the Libyan leader's arrival in Tunis on August 3 on a four-day visit, he was met by President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi, the head of the Chamber of Advisors, the head of the Chamber of Deputies, and various government officials. President Ben Ali received al-Qadhafi on August 4. According to the Tunis Afrique Press Agency, the official government news agency, President Ben Ali expressed appreciation about the completion of Omar El Mokhtar city, a suburb of Tunis where al-Qadhafi donated money for low-income housing. (Note: The area was re-named for a Libyan martyr after al-Qadhafi's donation.) Al-Qadhafi later attended a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the site with President Ben Ali on August 5 and received a tour. Al-Qadhafi and Ben Ali also discussed a Sfax-Tripoli freeway and a joint-power project. The two leaders also discussed ways to reenergize the Arab Maghreb Union and a range of other regional and international issues.

¶3. (C) Al-Qadhafi spoke to Tunisian intellectuals and the Minister of Culture and Heritage Preservation Mohamed el Aziz Ben Achour on August 4. The Egyptian Ambassador, who was present at Ben Ali's dinner on August 4 and the meeting with intellectuals, commented that the only substance of note was with respect to al-Qadhafi's comments on the Mediterranean Union. In his various meetings, al-Qadhafi stressed the importance of African and Arab unity, and dismissed the proposed Union for the Mediterranean, saying the Arab Maghreb Union would be a better vehicle for cooperation. According to press reports, al-Qadhafi opined, "In my opinion it (the Union for the Mediterranean) is simply a new colonization attempt...if they (the Europeans) really are our friends then they should compensate us, so that colonization will not happen once again." "Libya did not accept the Union for the Mediterranean and (did not accept) to violate the African summit's resolutions or contribute to the division of Africa," he concluded.

¶4. (C) While in Tunisia, al-Qadhafi also met with civil society representatives. According to press reports, on August 4, a group of female activists spoke to al-Qadhafi about the situation of women in Africa and African and Arab unity. On August 5, Libya's Secretary of the General People's Committee for External Communication and International Cooperation Abderrahmen Chalgham met with Tunisian Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdelwaheb Abdallah. The two discussed bilateral relations and cooperation.

¶5. (C) President Ben Ali hosted a dinner in al-Qadhafi's honor on August 4. Those in attendance included senior members of the ruling Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD), Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi, the Secretaries General of several loyal opposition parties, and the ambassadors of Maghreb and African countries accredited in Tunisia. On August 5, while at the National Institute of Applied Science and Technology, al-Qadhafi received an honorary doctorate in Arab-Islamic Civilization from Carthage University. President Ben Ali presided over the ceremony.

Comment

¶6. (C) It is not unprecedented for al-Qadhafi to make unannounced visits to Tunisia. Asked about the phenomenon, one Tunisian shrugged, "We're used to it -- that's Qadhafi!" Conferring the honorary degree seemed to be similarly last-minute. When EmbOffs tried to contact officials at the Ministry of Higher Education on another matter on August 4, we were told that staffers were crashing on the honorary degree, something al-Qadhafi had reportedly asked for with little warning. Press reports have indicated that the visit will last four days, but with al-Qadhafi there is always some uncertainty, according to informed Tunisians. We will have further discussions with our contacts about the visit and report as appropriate. End Comment.
GODEC